

MA THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Public Information Department, 11150 East Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340

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PRESS RELEASE

ROBERT FRANK: NEW YORK TO NOVA SCOTIA
July 23 - August 31, 1986

Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia, an exhibition of photographs and films by one of the century's most provocative and influential photographers, opens at The Cleveland Museum of Art on July 23, 1986. This retrospective, which surveys Frank's work from 1947 to 1985, was organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and is the first major traveling exhibition of the artist's work in twenty years. It presents 157 of his photographs, all of his books of photographs, nine of his films, and two videotapes—one by Frank and one about him.

Frank was born in Switzerland in 1924 and immigrated in 1947 to the United States, where he worked in New York as a photojournalist and fashion photographer. In the early 1950s he returned to Europe, working in Paris, London, and Wales. It was in the mid-1950s that, supported by a Guggenheim fellowship, he undertook travels across the United States, driving as he took pictures, sometimes through the dirty windshield, usually holding his 35mm Leica with one hand as he steered his Ford coupe with the other. Those pictures, printed in a book titled The Americans (published in Europe in 1958 and in 1959 in the United States with a brief introduction by Jack Kerouac), mark a turning point in the history of modern photography. Their uncompromising somber vision of life in America's large cities and along its roadsides literally ended the humane and optimistic picture making that had characterized the immediate postwar years in America, best exemplified by Edward Steichen's popular 1955 exhibition, The Family of Man, in which some of Frank's earlier photographs had been included.

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The Americans outraged many American critics and influenced many photographers. Almost immediately after its publication, Frank turned from the still picture to film. Speaking later of the films he had made, Frank described his method: "It starts out as 'scrap book footage.' There is no script, there is plenty of intuition . . . I want you to see the shadow of life and death flickering on that screen." His first film, "Pull My Daisy," disturbed some viewers and enchanted others with its reality and immediacy. Frank made five films between 1959 and 1969, then disengaged himself from the New York life that had so alarmed, irritated and stimulated him when he first came from Switzerland. He moved to an isolated area of Nova Scotia and there continued to make films and books. In recent years he has again begun to make still photographs.

The exhibition, organized by Anne W. Tucker, Gus and Lyndall Wortham curator of photography at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and filmmaker Philip Brookman, displays in Ms. Tucker's words, Frank's "incredible range--from the sweet lyricism of the early European pictures to the harsh criticism of The Americans and finally the intimacy of his most recent autobiographical work." Her comment in the exhibition catalogue--that Frank is "famous for a book made thirty years ago and a film issued one year later"--is a clue to the premise of the exhibition: that far beyond these most widely known works, Robert Frank's work is enigmatic, original, and notable.

The catalogue includes essays by Jack Kerouac, poet Allen Ginsberg, physician-writer Robert Coles and previously unpublished letters Frank has written throughout his career. These, with pictures and reminiscences gathered from many sources, provide rich insights into Frank's images and intentions. His observation to a friend--"Pictures are probably closer to feelings than to thoughts"--suggests the emotional quality of the works in the exhibition.

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Funding for the exhibition has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency; Ford Motor Company Fund; Target Stores; Polaroid Corporation; Gay Block; and Sidney L. Shlenker. The Cleveland showing, which is under the supervision of Tom E. Hinson, curator of contemporary art, is supported by the Ohio Arts Council.

The videotape "Fire in the East: A Portrait of Robert Frank" will run continuously in the audio-visual center of the Museum each day throughout the exhibition, which closes on August 31. Programs of films by Frank will be shown in the Museum's Recital Hall at 8:00 pm on the following days:

Wed., Aug. 6 - PULL MY DAISY, 1959.
Directed by Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie. With Richard Bellamy,
Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Delphine Seyrig. B&W, 28 min.

THE SIN OF JESUS, 1961. With Telly Savalas. B&W, 40 min.

CONVERSATIONS IN VERMONT, 1969, B&W, 26 min.

Wed., Aug. 13 - LIFE-RAFT EARTH, 1969, B&W, 37 min.

ABOUT ME: A MUSICAL, 1971, B&W, 35 min.

Wed., Aug. 20 - KEEP BUSY, 1975, B&W, 38 min.

LIFE DANCES ON..., 1980, B&W, 30 min.

Wed., Aug. 27 - ENERGY AND HOW TO GET IT, 1981, B&W, 28 min.

THIS SONG FOR JACK, 1983, B&W, 30 min.

HOME IMPROVEMENTS, 1984-85, Color, 30 min.

(This videotape will be screened in the Lecture Hall
immediately following this evening's two films.)

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For additional information or black and white photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.